

Public Health Fact Sheet - Home Ventilation

What is ventilation?

Ventilation supplies fresh air to your home, and dilutes and removes stale air. There are many ways this can happen. For example, open windows to allow fresh outdoor air to displace indoor air, turn on the fan over the kitchen stove or in the bathroom as it helps remove odours and moisture. Other common examples of home ventilation include chimneys which remove combustion gases, and clothes dryer fans which remove warm, moist air and chemicals from laundry soaps.

You may already know if you have a ventilation problem. When you're at home:

- Do you notice a musty smell, or mould or mildew on ceilings or walls; especially when the house has been closed up?
- Is there condensation on the inside of your windows?

These may be signs of poor ventilation.

What are the benefits of having good ventilation at home?

Good ventilation protects you, your family, and your guests from unpleasant odours, irritating pollutants, and potentially dangerous gases like carbon monoxide. Well-planned ventilation also prevents the growth of mould and mildew, which can cause or aggravate allergic reactions and lung problems such as asthma, chronic bronchitis or emphysema.

Good ventilation also protects your home from damage, by eliminating excess moisture from the air. Too much moisture rots window sills and attic eaves, peels paint, and invites insect infestation. Damp insulation in walls and ceilings means lost heat, higher fuel bills, and destructive mould growth. Carpeting, wallpaper, electronic equipment, and furniture can all be damaged by excess moisture.

Remember that even without using kitchen or bathroom facilities, people and animals constantly breathe out water vapour into the air. Unflued gas space heaters are notorious for producing large volumes of water vapour.

How to improve ventilation at home?

The best way to improve ventilation around the home is to open windows on both sides of the house to ensure good air movement through the building.

The bathroom

A large percentage of moisture in your home comes from your bathroom - if not properly vented. Steam from your shower or bath quickly settles around the house when you open the door. You can remove moisture by:

- Opening bathroom windows and closing the bathroom door when having a shower or bath.
- Installing an extractor fan to remove steam, and duct it outside.

The kitchen

With cooking, steam gathers and condenses. You can remove moisture by:

- Using a range hood or extractor fan to remove the steam.
- Placing lids on pots when cooking.

Leaky roofs

A common problem with older houses, and even some new ones, is a roof that leaks. Water enters through joins or cracks, sits on top of insulation and soaks into the ceiling boards. Often the only evidence of a leak is slightly discoloured paintwork.

More often than not, by the time you notice the problem, there will be an unhealthy growth of mould spores.

How do I remove moisture from my home?

The best way to remove moisture from your home is the simplest. During the warmest part of the day open at least two windows. This encourages the air to circulate. In addition, you might consider:

- Installing ventilation strips above windows.
- Installing a heat pump or other mechanical heating/ventilation system.
- Using portable dehumidifier.

Further information

Please contact Auckland Regional Public Health Services on (09) 623 4600 and ask for the duty Health Protection Officer in the Healthy Environments team if you require further advice or have concerns about ventilation in your home.